

From the New York Times:
Bangladesh Blast Kills One and Hurts 30

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Correction Appended

DHAKA, Bangladesh, Dec. 1 - A suicide bomber took aim at this country's rattled judiciary on Thursday for the third time this week, killing one person and wounding 30.



A man wounded yesterday in a bombing in Gazipur, Bangladesh, was comforted by his wife while awaiting treatment at a hospital in Dhaka.

The three suicide bombings, which killed a total of 11 people, including 2 bombers, and wounded more than 100 people, indicate an expansion of a three-month-old campaign against the judiciary in this mostly Muslim nation of 144 million people by militants seeking to replace the secular legal system with Islamic law.

Two apparently synchronized bombings on Tuesday were aimed at a courthouse and a law office.

The target on Thursday was a government office where lawyers were to meet.

Violence has risen steadily in Bangladesh in recent months, some of it attributed to political rivals, some to Islamic militants. But the attacks this week were the country's first successful suicide strikes.

The two suspects in the attacks on Tuesday died; the suspect in the attack on Thursday survived and was arrested, the police said.

The blast on Thursday occurred in Gazipur, 20 miles north of Dhaka, the capital. In one of the attacks on Tuesday, the bomber blew himself up in the bar association building in Gazipur. Earlier

on Tuesday, a bomber struck at a police checkpoint at the entrance to a courthouse in Chittagong, the major port.

The police said they suspected all three attacks had been conducted by Jamaat ul-Mujahedeen Bangladesh, or the Bangladesh Assembly of Holy Warriors, an outlawed Islamist faction seeking to impose Muslim law.

In leaflets found at the bomb sites this week and in earlier attacks, the group has called for the eradication of the judiciary and its replacement by Islamic law.

The attack on Thursday occurred during a strike called by the country's Supreme Court Bar Association to protest attacks apparently aimed at the judiciary. The strike brought Dhaka to a near standstill, with most shops closed and light traffic on the normally busy streets. Police officers in full riot gear blocked several major streets. "Violence is not new in Bangladesh, but this is a dramatic and major change in the tactic of the militancy," said Ali Riaz, a former professor at Dhaka University who teaches at Illinois State University and wrote "God Willing," a book about the rise of Islamic militancy in Bangladesh.

The police said they had arrested 50 people suspected of being Islamic militants in connection with the attacks on Tuesday, including the father and brother of one of the bombing suspects. The police said they had begun a nationwide search for others.

The attacks sharpen the challenge for the government of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia to restore some semblance of security in an increasingly volatile situation. Her governing Bangladesh Nationalist Party has come under fire in the past for alliances with right-wing politicians from the religious Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh party.

In November, a member of Parliament from the governing party was ousted for criticizing the party's alliance with Islamist forces. The religious parties have insisted they have no connections to the militants.

Bangladesh was violently carved from what was Pakistan in 1971. Although it began as a secular democracy, a tide of religious militancy has been growing.

It has been fueled in part by the lure of Islamist movements elsewhere, by crushing poverty and unemployment, and by infighting among political parties that has led to a breakdown in the ability to govern.

On Aug. 17, more than 450 homemade bombs were set off across the country. Two people were killed. The police blamed the Assembly of Holy Warriors for those attacks as well.

The violence this week began at a Chittagong courthouse on Tuesday morning, when police officers at the door stopped a man from entering.

The man, later identified as Abul Bashar, set off a bomb strapped to his body, blowing off his legs and hands and killing one of the officers and a civilian. Mr. Bashar later died. His father and brother have been detained, the police said.

An hour after the explosion, a second suicide bomber, disguised in a black lawyer's robe, blew himself up in the Gazipur Bar Association office, where some 50 lawyers and their clients had assembled. The powerful bomb reduced the room to ashes and blew out the windows, killing seven people, including the bomber.

The police later discovered wires wrapped around the legs and torso of the bomber's mutilated body. On Thursday, at the gate of the chief government administrator's office in Gazipur, where lawyers had planned to meet later in the day, the third bomber detonated explosives hidden in a tea flask, said Muhammad al-Amin, a government worker who had been posted at the gate. The blast killed a bystander, and wounded 30 people, including Mr. Amin.

The attacks on the judiciary have been going on for about three months. In early October, people suspected of being militants bombed courtrooms in Chittagong and two other southeastern districts. Later that month, a judge in Sylhet was wounded in a bomb attack on his vehicle.

In the last three months, a report by the Asian Center for Human Rights said, 2 judges have been killed, 3 have been wounded and 13 have received death threats.

The police said last month that people suspected of being militants had told them under interrogation that the Holy Warriors have 2,000 people prepared to carry out suicide bombings.

The attacks this week, security analysts say, were a step up in the tactics of the Islamic militants and underscore their strength and organization.

"Definitely the explosive was more powerful," than those used in previous blasts, said Sakhawat Hussain, a retired brigadier general and now a security analyst.

David Montero reported from Dhaka for this article, and Somini Sengupta from Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Correction: Dec. 3, 2005, Saturday:

Because of an editing error, an article yesterday about suicide bombings directed at the judicial system in Bangladesh misstated the country's population. It is 144 million, not 44 million. In some editions, the article also misstated the number of people wounded in the suicide bombing on Thursday. It was 30 people, not 100, which was the total number wounded in three suicide bombings this week